

The Croydon Chronicle

NEWSLETTER FALL 2008



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LETTER FROM THE SUPERVISOR

As the days grow shorter and cooler, my thoughts turn to bouquets of freshly sharpened pencils, the brilliance of fall foliage yet to come and the serene beauty of our quiet corner in Rockville at the Croydon Creek Nature Center.

The center and the adjacent John G. Hayes Forest Preserve provide a natural oasis in the hustle and bustle of hectic urban life. On any given day, one might see a box turtle working its way through the meadow or a black rat snake sunning itself by the creek. Each day there is something new to see or experience.

The Nature Center is the perfect place for people of all ages to connect with the natural world, enjoy being outdoors and gain some new insight into their environment.

Our staff has been hard at work producing our first newsletter. Many of our regular visitors have expressed interest in the happenings at the center and staff has responded with a fact-filled newsletter that offers seasonal articles as well as announcements of upcoming programs and classes.

With more than 30 programs offered this fall, we are sure you will find a

program that piques your interests.

Get Outdoors: New to CCNC are adult outdoor trips. If you are interested in exploring hiking or biking trails, look to our adult trips to provide you with opportunities to explore Maryland's outdoor wonders.

New Programs: Fall brings with it not only bounty of changing colors but new classes. Our Croydon Creek Campfires are new this fall with family-friendly *Spooky Stories* in October and *Animals Nobody Loves* in November. Additionally,

we are offering a card making class and a wreath making class just in time for the holidays. Be sure to check out our complete list of classes in the newsletter or online

at www.rockvillemd.gov/croydoncreek.

We hope you enjoy our newsletter and we welcome any feedback.

e-mail your comments to naturecenter@rockvillemd.gov.

Warm wishes,

Elissa Totin
Supervisor



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MEET THE CROYDON CRITTERS



Meet **Meep** one of the center's American Toads (*Bufo americanus*) who has lived and taught children at the center for about a year. American toads are common throughout Maryland and most of the northern portion of the eastern United States.

As adults they live in forests and meadows but they start out their lives in the water as tadpoles. They can grow to about 2 inches to 3.5 inches in length and their favorite foods are insects, spiders, slugs, grubs and worms.

Next time you stop by the nature center be sure to find Meep and ask how he got his name.

A FOND FAREWELL



This fall staff at the nature center bid a fond farewell to Elaine Honig. Elaine has been a receptionist extraordinaire at CCNC for more than four years and has decided to retire from the center to pursue her passion for travel and spend more time with her family.

Prior to joining the center, Elaine had a successful career working in the federal government in the Department of Defense with assignments at the Pentagon and overseas in Switzerland, Belgium and Greece. She then spent many years raising her family and pursuing other interests.

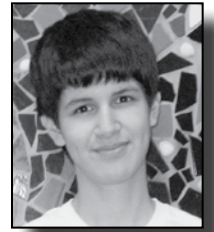
Elaine joined the staff at CCNC in 2004 where she quickly found her niche greeting all visitors with a warm "Welcome to the Nature Center" and spearheading

our marketing efforts. We will miss Elaine's sunny disposition, her outgoing personality, and her genuine concern for all who visit and work at CCNC. "I will miss my friends at the Nature Center but especially, the thousands of children that pass through our doors each year," Elaine said.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: Our Graduates

CCNC relies on its many dedicated volunteers who provide valuable help with a variety of projects. We are celebrating two fantastic high school volunteers, Victor Villagomez and Margot Buchbinder, who have demonstrated a keen dedication to the reptiles and amphibians that call CCNC home.



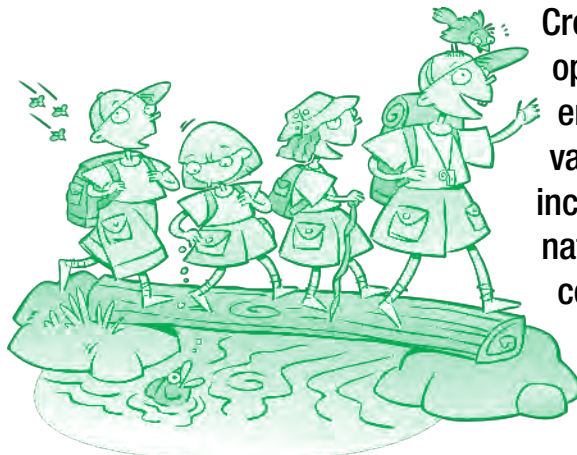
Victor has been volunteering with us for many years, providing much needed animal care on the weekends. He is a dedicated worker who devotes most of his Sundays to feeding, misting and caring for our animals.

Margot volunteers with her brother, Julien, by cleaning turtle tanks and weighing all of the center's critters on a weekly basis. She always comes in with a smile and a positive attitude.

Both Victor and Margot are leaving this fall to attend college. We wish them all the best and will miss them.



SCHOOL PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES



Croydon Creek offers program opportunities for school groups. We offer environmental education programs for a variety of ages. These programs aim to incorporate hands-on activities that make natural science fun and exciting. Please contact us at 240-314-8770 to find out more about bringing your class to Croydon Creek.

WHY DO FALL LEAVES CHANGE COLOR?

By Melinda Norton, Assistant Supervisor

As summer gives way to autumn and the days become shorter and the temperatures colder, trees provide a brilliant show.

Leaves go from green to rich warm colors. Did you know that this change in scenery is a survival mechanism for trees?

Leaves are food for trees. During the spring and summer, they “grab” sunlight and turn it into chemical energy that the tree can use as food.

Leaves take carbon dioxide from the air, and use it in combination with water that the roots draw from the ground and from sunlight. Together they make the sugars and starches that trees use for energy to grow.

One of the essential tools that trees use to accomplish photosynthesis is a pigment called chlorophyll, which gives leaves their green color, as well as playing an important role in photosynthesis.

Other plant pigments are carotinoids, xanthophylls and anthocyanins. Carotenoids and xanthophylls are known for giving a yellow-orange color to corn, bananas and carrots. These pigments produce yellow to orange-red colors but are masked by the strong green color of chlorophyll during the growing season. Anthocyanins give a red to purple color to fruits, such as cranberries, blueberries and cherries.

The reason that many leaves appear green is due to the wavelengths of light that are absorbed and reflected. Green leaves have absorbed the other wavelengths of light (especially the reds and blues) and are reflecting the green wavelengths from the chlorophyll contained within.

As the end of the growing season approaches, there are seasonal changes that affect the production of chlorophyll. These include moisture and temperature, but the largest contributing factor to a tree’s reduction in chlorophyll production is daylight. Less daylight triggers a slowdown and eventual stop in chlorophyll production. As the last of the chlorophyll is broken down, the other colors that the leaves contain begin to show.

At the same time, in the stem of each leaf a special layer of cells develops. These cells begin to cut off the veins that run between the leaf and the branch. Eventually the layer of cells completely severs the leaf from the tree, and the leaf falls to the ground.

As the leaves are slowly being cut from the tree, sugars and starches being produced by photosynthesis are trapped. Trapped sugars allow the

autumn leaves of sugar maples, oaks and dogwoods to turn red or even purplish.

Weather plays a keen role in the brilliance of the colors. The most vibrant fall colors occur when the days are warm and sunny, and the nights are cool and crisp but not freezing. These conditions are ideal because the sun causes the remaining chlorophyll to continue driving photosynthesis. This means that sugars and starches are being produced even as chlorophyll is breaking down. The cool evenings help the veins to close more quickly, so that the sugars and starches are trapped inside the leaf. The more sugars that the leaf holds the more anthocyanin it will produce thus giving the most striking shades of red and purple.

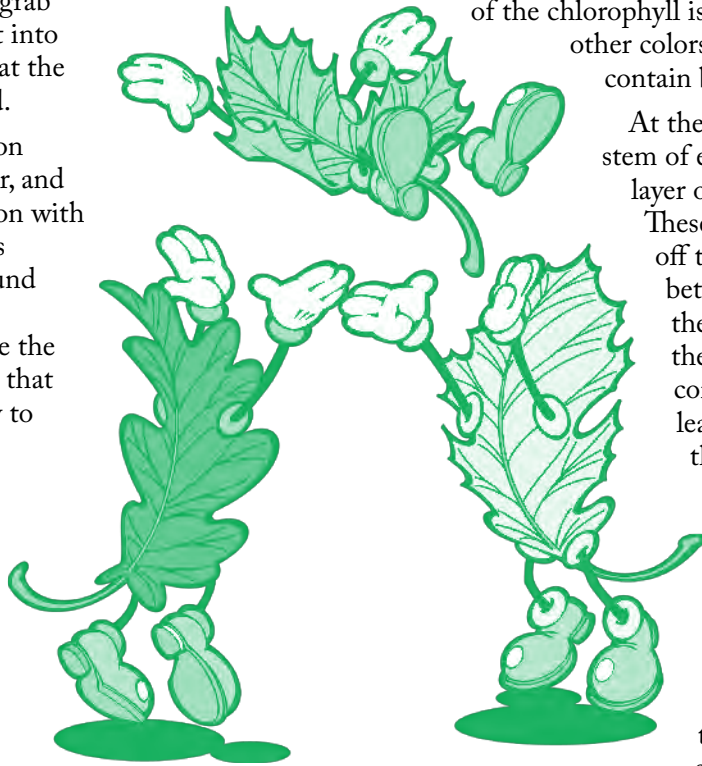
So, get out and enjoy the show that Mother Nature will orchestrate this fall.

MEET THE CROYDON CRITTERS

Introducing **Elroy**, one of the center’s corn snakes (*Elaphe guttata guttata*). Elroy has an interesting life history.

He came to the nature center by way of several other educational institutions, including the National Zoo. Elroy was hatched in 1991, making him the oldest snake at the nature center at the age of 17. Elroy is a heterozygous corn snake, which means that one of his parents was albino while the other was a corn snake of regular coloration. This gives Elroy his beautiful orange color.

You may want to stop by the nature center on a Thursday to see Elroy enjoying his favorite food: mice. The snakes are fed on Thursdays at 3:30 p.m.





Parties for children

at Croydon Creek Nature Center



Fee: \$180 (R) / \$204 (NR)
for 10 participants
\$10 for each additional child
Saturday: 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. and 2-4:30 p.m.
Sunday 2-4:30 p.m.
Ages: 3+ Maximum children: 25
For information: 240-314-8770



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